

AP - Las Vegas

## Anti-nuclear group opposes 'environmental threat'

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LAS VEGAS (AP) - An environmental and anti-nuclear group is calling on federal officials to cancel plans to detonate 700 tons of explosives at the Nevada Test Site in an experiment designed to study ground motion and shock waves. The test, dubbed "Divine Strake" by the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, is an environmental threat because it could release into the air surface contamination from previous atomic bomb tests, said Citizen Alert, a Nevada advocacy group.

The group is one of several to oppose the test since a Defense Department official stirred controversy last week by saying the June 2 explosion would create "a mushroom cloud over Las Vegas." Federal officials have since retracted the statement, and Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev, said he's been assured the test would use only conventional explosives and no nuclear materials.

While it would create a large dust cloud, the cloud was not expected to be visible off the Nevada Test Site, Reid said.

Citizen Alert Executive Director Peggy Maze Johnson on Friday called on the agency that runs the test site, the National Nuclear Security Administration, to give the public a chance to comment on the blast by conducting a formal environmental impact statement.

Test site spokesman Darwin Morgan said the Divine Strake experiment will not disperse surface contamination left over from aboveground nuclear weapons tests conducted in the 1950s and 1960s.

He said the nearest ground-zero areas of known contamination are three to six miles away from the Divine Strake location, which is 85 miles northwest of Las Vegas in Area 16 of the sprawling, 1,375-square-mile test site. Morgan said the experiment is being conducted under the terms of an existing air permit from the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection. "Because the site is located just eight miles from Yucca Flat, the location of hundreds of nuclear tests over the last 50 years, there is the real possibility that previous radioactive contamination now sitting at the (Nevada Test Site) could be excited and thrown into the atmosphere," Maze Johnson said in a statement.

On Monday, a group of scientists criticized plans for Divine Strake, saying the test is intended to simulate a nuclear blast as part of Pentagon research into the development of low-yield nuclear weapons.

The Pentagon refused to confirm or deny the claim made by the Federation of American Scientists, a Washington, D.C.-based liberal policy group opposed to development of nuclear weapons.

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